

conservative of our people, especially because one of them, R. H. Bunting, is a United States Commissioner, and respect for his office, they say, should have been a protection.” The paper concluded that, despite Bunting’s position, his “political record in cooperating with the negro element . . . had so embittered many people . . . that it was feared that they could not be restrained from violence.”<sup>21</sup> The white men were put on trains on the eleventh and sent to New Bern, where they were ushered further north towards Virginia.<sup>22</sup> Justice Bunting was particularly distasteful to white men because he had married a black woman and they believed “his police courts . . . held the scales of justice so as to favor the negroes and severely punish the whites.”<sup>23</sup> His home was “visited” by white men who ransacked the house and hung portraits of Bunting and his wife in the street at Seventh and Market to further incite white supremacy hatred for miscegenation. The day after the riot, Bunting appealed to white leaders for protection and was escorted to the city limits for his protection.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Bunting was a Deputy Marshall of the United States District Court in Wilmington and was a magistrate in the city. *Morning Star* (Wilmington), November 12, 1898; *Branson’s North Carolina Business Directory*, 1897, 448-449.

<sup>22</sup> The *Wilmington Messenger* reflected the sentiments of the campaign when it noted that the root of the “evil” of race relations were “mean white men”—northerners who came to the South and courted black voters. However, some of the white men targeted were Wilmington natives or longtime residents of the city. Melton was a Wilmington native. The New Bern press reported to the *News and Observer* that the Atlantic Coast Line train carrying the white Republicans from Wilmington arrived, and they were escorted from the train to the steamer *Neuse*, which sailed at 6:00 for Elizabeth City. *News and Observer* (Raleigh), 11-12-98; *Morning Star* (Wilmington), November 12, 1898; *Contested Election Case*, 360; *Wilmington Messenger*, November 15, 1898.

<sup>23</sup> *News and Observer* (Raleigh), November 12, 1898.

<sup>24</sup> Although it was reported that Bunting was escorted to the city limits for his protection, Chief of Police

Like Peamon, George French was treated separately from the others. Before French was “found” at the Orton Hotel and escorted to the train by a squad, he was located by Morton earlier during the day of the riot and “asked” to pen support for the use of the Naval Reserves. Morton reported to the adjutant general that he “found the Sheriff at the Orton Hotel, in his room, and notified him of the state of affairs and demanded as a citizen that he go out and preserve the peace.” French, as acting sheriff in Elijah Hewlett’s stead, “declined” to leave his room but, instead, wrote an order for Morton and Walker Taylor of the Wilmington Light Infantry to “use all force at your disposal to quell the existing violation of the peace in this city.”<sup>25</sup> Previous threats had circulated that French was to be hanged on “Church Street, between Front and Surry, directly in front of the old James J. Darby home.” In response to the threats, French was hidden by Orton clerk James J. Allen, who said that he had not hidden French “out of any friendship for the ‘carpetbagger’ but simply to assist in keeping down violence.” While boarding the northbound train, French was told to “leave North Carolina and never return again upon peril of his life.” While at the station, French was attacked by a group of men who placed a noose around his neck and started to hang him from a light pole on North Front Street. French was struggling for breath and “uttered the Masonic cry of

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Melton explained that Bunting was held at the cemetery until he was joined by Melton and others. Bunting and the men were then marched under guard through town to the railroad depot where they were sent out of town. Melton observed that Bunting was targeted for verbal abuse once on board the train. *Contested Election Case*, 364-6; *Evening Dispatch* (Wilmington), November 11, 1898; Prather, *We Have Taken a City*, 140-41.

<sup>25</sup> Zeb Walser, *Biennial Report of the Attorney General of the State of North Carolina, 1897-1898*, 31.